King (John) Vicar of Witnesham

A

SERMON,

PREACHED AT WITNESHAM,

NOVEMBER 29, 1798,

BEING THE DAY APPOINTED

FOR A GENERAL THANKSGIVING

ON ACCOUNT OF

OUR LATE VICTORIES.

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TO

THE WORSHIPFUL THE BAILIFFS,

PORTMEN,

AND COMMON COUNCIL,

OF IPSWICH,

THE FOLLOWING

SERMON

IS INSCRIBED,

AS A SMALL MARK OF

RESPECT AND GRATITUDE,

BY THEIR MUCH OBLIGED

AND HUMBLE SERVANT,

JOHN KING.

A SERMON.

ISAIAH XXVI. Verſe 4.

Truſt ye in the Lord for ever: for in the Lord Jehovah is everlaſting ſtrength.

NOTHING can impreſs upon our minds a ſtronger conviction of the Power and Majeſty of the Supreme Being, than the words of the text. And indeed the Sacred Scriptures abound with ſo many appeals to that Almighty Being, who created the world, that we cannot read them, but with awe and veneration. No other writings, even of the moſt ſublime authors, are in any degree comparable to them for energy of expreſſion, for juſt and grand notions of Omnipotence, for making us bend with ſubmiſſion to

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the divine will, and raiſing us to an ardent deſire of heavenly things.

This chapter is wholly compoſed in this ſtyle:—For while it commemorates a great deliverance of the Jews, and contraſts their preſent flouriſhing ſtate under the divine protection, with their former diſtreſs and miſery, it raiſes in us the like feelings, and aſſimilates us to the people of God.—Thus the inhabitants of the world learn righteouſneſs—they truſt in the Lord, and confeſs that in the Lord Jehovah is everlaſting ſtrength.

Thus much for the occaſion and deſign of theſe words: And now let me apply them more particularly to ourſelves, and our preſent ſituation.

We are this day called upon by authority to acknowledge the protecting hand of providence, in enabling us to give a moſt fatal blow to our enemies. And the ſentiments, which naturally ariſe on ſuch an occaſion, are thoſe of gratitude and obedience. I might here lay before you the riſe and progreſs of this moſt calamitous war—But the ſeveral particulars are thoroughly known by all; and therefore

fore it would be needleſs to recall events which can only give pain and anxiety. Let it ſuffice to ſay, that the preſent ſituation of Europe is the moſt awful, perhaps, which can be conceived. After a moſt horrid carnage in many bloody battles, after a profuſion of expence, after the moſt unexpected changes and revolutions in many ſtates, we are ſtill overwhelmed with ſuſpence and fear. Wherever we look, the proſpect is lowring—The dangers, which ſtill threaten all nations, muſt appall the moſt courageous mind; and we muſt tremble, leſt we and our families ſhould be involved in the general wreck.

Undoubtedly the ſtrength of this nation is great—Its ſituation by ſea and land is far ſuperior to any former period—Our fleets are powerful and our forces numerous—and our people are united, as it were, with one heart and mind to make head againſt the common enemy. So far we have reaſon to hope for a happy iſſue, and not to be alarmed at the threats and open attacks of our enemies. But ſtill many things may happen, which may render our ſtrength weakneſs, and counteract all our exertions. If the Lord, for juſt provocations or the fulfilment of his counſels, ſhould withdraw his protection, we ſhould ſoon become a prey to others,

others, and ſink into obſcurity. For he bringeth down them that dwell on high: the lofty city he layeth it low—However, let us hope that this period is far diſtant. We have made many ſucceſsful efforts againſt the enemy—we have vanquiſhed their ſtrongeſt fleets—we have foiled their deepeſt plans—and we ſtill flouriſh as a commercial and mighty nation.

Theſe advantages, if ſupported properly, and if we can juſtly claim the aid and protection of providence, will render us invulnerable; and we ſhall in God's due time eſcape from the danger which ſurrounds us.

While therefore we look up to heaven with grateful hearts, for thoſe many victories which we have gained over an inveterate enemy, let us ſincerely put in practice thoſe duties which may further entitle us to God's favour.

Now we cannot propoſe to ourſelves a better rule to walk by, than thoſe emphatic words of the prophet: "He hath ſhewed thee, O man, what is good: and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do juſtly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

Theſe

Theſe are the grand duties of life—they not only give the higheſt luſtre to private characters, but eſtabliſh the character of a nation on the beſt foundation; not only rendering it conſpicuous in the ſcale of ſociety and government, but worthy of the favour of a juſt and all-gracious God. I believe we may affirm with great truth, that the Engliſh Nation is equal, if not ſuperior to moſt others, for its love of juſtice and faith in their general intercourſe with one another. They have that generoſity and candour of mind, which begets confidence, and baniſhes deceit and impoſition—ſo that all concerns betwixt man and man are carried on, generally ſpeaking, with credit and honour—and as to mercy and charity, the numerous proviſions for misfortunes and the wants of our fellow-creatures, which are to be met with in every town, are ſufficient proofs of the beſt affections in our countrymen. Nay, to ſuch an extent is this ornament and peculiar boaſt of Chriſtianity carried, that every day almoſt produces ſome new alleviation of diſtreſs—ſomething which may give comfort to the heavy-hearted. And here let me mention thoſe numerous ſubſcriptions during this war, for the relatives of thoſe who have fallen in their country's cauſe. Though the public burthens are weighty, and the payment of thoſe taxes, which are neceſſary for the ſupport of our

Government, preſſes hard upon many, yet the public ſpirit ſhews itſelf in numerous claſſes by voluntary contributions of the moſt liberal kind. This is no ſelf-intereſted ſpirit, but the genuine dictates of a liberal mind. It ariſes from that ſympathy, which is innate in the Engliſh breaſt, and foſtered by religion ſhews itſelf upon all occaſions, when indigence or misfortune have any claim upon us. So far the national character ſtands in the moſt honourable light, and has no mean claim upon that diſtinction which the Prophet enforces—"What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do juſtly, and to love mercy?"

But there is another duty ſtill remaining, without which the others muſt loſe much of their juſt value. This is—"we muſt walk humbly with our God."—This gives perfection to all the reſt—this makes our ſacrifice acceptable to God—our actions have thus an honourable foundation—and we ſhall have favour with God and Man. Without this our juſtice and its kindred virtues may be founded in ſelfiſhneſs and the meaneſt principles; our charity and mercy may be a cloak for hypocriſy; they may ariſe from vain glory and oſtentation: or, what has too often been the caſe, they may be deemed a compenſation for the blackeſt crimes, upon the idle

idle ſuppoſition and mis-interpretation of the words—"Charity covereth a multitude of ſins."

Hence we ſee the neceſſity of religious principles. And we truſt, that notwithſtanding the many complaints of the corruption and wickedneſs of the age, religion is ſtill practiſed in ſincerity, and its true principles cultivated, by a great majority of the Engliſh Nation. For while ſurrounding nations have been the victims of ſuperſtition and bigotry, or have run into the other extreme of infidelity, the Word of God has been ſtudied among us with candour and liberality, its precepts and doctrines enforced with true ſincerity, and religious worſhip cultivated on thoſe principles which muſt ever render it a pleaſing and honourable ſervice.

Hence we have the pleaſing hope that we are not yet a devoted nation, and that we ſhall, like gold that is purified in the fire, be rendered more acceptable unto God by the trial we are now ſtruggling with.

Let us therefore hold faſt our integrity without wavering. While we exert ourſelves in defence of our country, as a loyal and brave people; and while we hold thoſe maxims and

and principles in utter deteſtation, by which our enemies regulate their conduct, let us ſtill look up to the Almighty Diſpoſer of all Events, and place our confidence in his power and juſtice.

Calamities of all kinds, whether of a public or private nature, have generally a very ſalutary effect upon our minds. In ſome caſes indeed they may oppreſs the ſufferer to ſuch a degree, as to deprive him of all juſt reflection, and reduce him to a ſtate of melancholy and deſpair—and in public bodies and kingdoms they may damp the energy of their counſels, and make them view their ſituation as hopeleſs and deſperate.—But the moſt natural effect of calamity in the individual is to conſider, how far he is deſerving of it—how far his actions have been baſe and wicked—and whether his ſufferings are not the juſt conſequence of ſome violation of God's ſacred commands. Hence he is led to review thoſe principles of religion which enforce every virtuous ſentiment, and to fear and ſtand in awe of that God, whoſe providence and government are conſpicuous in the general tendency of virtue and godlineſs to promote happineſs.

Thus

Thus likewiſe in thoſe ſtates, whoſe conſtitutions are formed on the baſis of religion, all public miſery and calamity, ſuch as peſtilence, famine, or war, has the ſame effect upon the public mind. The whole body becomes appalled with the awe of Almighty God, under whoſe judgments they conſider themſelves as guilty offenders. Hence the rulers are admoniſhed to have recourſe to thoſe public duties of ſupplication and prayer, by which the people in their collective capacity may apply to the Throne of Heaven for protection and favour. Hence the public, as one man, bow down before the Lord in humility and contrition.

Thus is public virtue rouſed, and the Kingdom of God eſtabliſhed with greater energy, when the judgments of the Lord are abroad in the earth. In this ſituation likewiſe, we are more attentive and more grateful for every favourable event. For as, when imminent danger threatens, we exert every means in our power to evade it, under a juſt ſenſe of our final dependence upon God; ſo the firſt emotion or impulſe of the mind upon ſucceſs, is gratitude to the Almighty Diſpoſer of all Events.

By theſe reflections I wiſh only to recall your thoughts to thoſe principles, which naturally actuate the minds of men, and tend to promote their beſt intereſts. What events are laid up in the womb of futurity?—what changes or calamities await the ſeveral nations of the world?—when this havock, which has deſolated Europe ſo long, will ceaſe?—when they will be permitted, by the romantic plans or the weak counſels of their governors, to change their ſpears into pruning-hooks, and to adore that God, who made them, in peace and charity?—theſe things are beyond the imagination of any individual to conceive! However we may, and ought to be ſincerely thankful for every thing which may tend to keep the ſtorm at a diſtance—and we may reaſonably hope that every blow, which we inflict upon the enemy, will eventually produce the deſired change in their counſels, and by humbling their pride and haughtineſs, make them liſten to reaſonable accommodation. In this awful ſuſpence, let us not forget our duty to God, as well as ourſelves. Let us humbly ſupplicate him to direct our counſels, and infuſe into the hearts of our governors, wiſdom, juſtice, and godlineſs—that they may be led to purſue thoſe plans, which may not only counteract every ſcheme deviſed for our deſtruction; but

ſecure

ſecure the means of gaining peace. Let us likewiſe humbly pray to God, that the ſame ſpirit of union and valour may diſtinguiſh our fleets and armies, and animate the breaſts of individuals, which has hitherto foiled all ſecret attempts againſt the Government, and baffled the open attacks of the enemy.

With ſuch ſentiments of humility, praiſe and thankſgiving, we ſhall proſtrate ourſelves before God in the only manner, which can give us hope and confidence; that is, with contrition and repentance. For what confident, or impenitent ſinner can approach the Throne of Heaven with any juſt hope of favour? The creed of reaſon and religion is, "Rend your hearts and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God."

I will not ſay more—"If ye know theſe things, happy are ye if ye do them."—Thus may "ye truſt in the Lord for ever; for in the Lord Jehovah is everlaſting ſtrength."

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